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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 TAIPEI 001584

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SUBJECT: PRC ARATS CHAIRMAN CONCLUDES TAIWAN VISIT AFTER LONG DAY OF PROTESTS

REF: A. TAIPEI 1564
1B. TAIPEI 1530

Classified By: AIT Director Stephen M. Young,
Reasons: 1.4 (b/d)

11. (C) Summary: After a day and night of intense and sometimes violent protest demonstrations on Thursday (Nov. 6), Taipei is breathing a sigh of relief following PRC Association for Relations Across the Taiwan Strait (ARATS) Chairman Chen Yunlin's smooth departure for Beijing this morning. Chen's visit included the signing of four agreements between ARATS and Taiwan's Straits Exchange Foundation (SEF) that will expand cross-Straight transportation ties and facilitate cooperation on food safety (ref A). Chen met with top KMT leaders, including a very brief but symbolically significant meeting with President Ma Ying-jeou.

This week's events and the protests against Chen's visit will provide the ruling Kuomintang (KMT) and opposition Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) with more ammunition to trade jabs and question each other's competency and ability to advance Taiwan interests. Both Foreign Minister Ou and Legislative Speaker Wang suggested to the Director that the protests could give Chen and Beijing a better understanding of the real political situation in Taiwan. NSC Secretary General Su Chi told us he and President Ma believe the visit was a success, and paves the way for more progress in the coming months. End Summary.

Chen Yunlin Concludes Five Day Visit to Taiwan

12. (SBU) ARATS Chairman Chen Yunlin departed Taoyuan International Airport shortly after 10 a.m. this morning on a regular cross-Straight charter flight to Beijing, concluding the first-ever visit to Taiwan by a high-level PRC representative. Compared to the dramatic demonstrations that surrounded the visit over the last two days and nights, Chen's departure went smoothly, though one Falungong protester managed to shout out, "Stop Persecuting Falungong" as Chen walked through the waiting room to the aircraft. Earlier, in a brief departure ceremony at the Grand Hotel, SEF Chairman P. K. Chiang and Chen both delivered remarks, thanking those who had helped with the visit. Chen, who refrained from commenting on the protesters, specially commended the police, noting that some had shed blood in

their work to protect his security. The day before his departure, Chen had canceled a scheduled late afternoon press conference.

¶13. (SBU) Many people in Taiwan will breathe a sigh of relief that Chen's brief but tumultuous visit has concluded. The first two days of Chen's visit (Monday - Tuesday) went smoothly enough, focusing on the formal talks between ARATS and SEF that resulted in the signing of four cross-Strait agreements on air transportation, sea transportation, postal links, and cooperation on food safety. Subsequently, Chen participated in seminars and banquets, visited the Hsinchu Science Park and an orchid farm, and met Master Cheng Yen, the founder and head of Tzu Chi, a Buddhist organization very well known for international relief efforts, including in response to the Sichuan earthquake.

¶14. (C) The main focus of the second half of Chen's visit was his meeting with President Ma Ying-jeou. The key question for the Taiwan public was whether Chen would treat Ma with sufficient respect and dignity, in particular whether Chen would address Ma as "President Ma." In the event, because of these sensitivities, the entire meeting was kept to just seven minutes, setting a record for brevity. To emphasize the disparity in rank between Ma and Chen, only Ma delivered remarks. While Ma was announced as "President," Chen addressed him with the honorific form of "you." Reportedly, Ma's reference to "mutual non-denial" in his remarks was intended as an assertion that Chen's meeting with him indicated the PRC did not deny his status as president.

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Protests Turn Violent

¶15. (C) The DPP planned its major protest demonstration to coincide with the meeting between President Ma and Chen Yunlin, which was originally scheduled for late Thursday afternoon. Already worked up because of earlier confrontations with the police elsewhere in Taipei, DPP supporters were further inflamed when Ma suddenly moved the meeting with Chen up by several hours in hopes of avoiding the demonstration. Police estimate that 30,000 people participated in the hastily launched DPP demonstration near the Taipei Guesthouse, which began during the Ma-Chen meeting and continued throughout the afternoon. Although DPP Chairperson Tsai Ing-wen had called for a peaceful and rational demonstration, some protesters were in an ugly mood and turned violent when confronted with police lines and barbed wire barricades. Clashes erupted as lines of demonstrators and police with shields pushed at each other. Demonstrators threw bottles, rocks, and other objects and tore down some barricades, while some police wielded clubs. Tsai announced the demonstration's conclusion at 5:30 p.m.

¶16. (SBU) Despite Tsai's announcement of the end of the DPP rally at 5:30 p.m., some other DPP figures, including former legislator Wang Shu-hui and former DPP China Affairs Director Yu Mei-mei, had earlier already started to lead hundreds or more protesters on a march toward the Grand Hotel three miles to the north, where Chen was staying. Riled-up protesters continued to the Taipei Fine Arts Museum grounds, still at a distance from the Grand Hotel, where they were blocked by riot police. Although the DPP reportedly made an effort to stop the protest, more people joined the crowd in the evening. Protesters threw objects and clashed with police, who announced they would clear the area at midnight. Late in the evening, some protesters threw Molotov cocktails at police, and the police deployed a water cannon to help clear the area. The site was finally cleared completely after 1 a.m. this morning.

¶17. (SBU) In a press statement, Tsai criticized the government but expressed regret for injuries suffered by the public and the police. Tsai suggested provocateurs may have

been responsible for instigating some violence (see also ref B), and she stressed that the evening demonstration at the Taipei Fine Arts Museum was not a DPP-sponsored event.

According to the Taipei Public Health Department, the demonstrations in the day and evening yesterday resulted in 47 injuries (21 protesters, 18 police, 6 reporters and 2 DPP legislators). The situation has returned to normal today.

¶18. (C) Two public opinion polls in pro-Blue newspapers suggest that the demonstrations may have tarnished the image of Tsai Ing-wen, who previously has been viewed as moderate, scoring high in polls since taking over as DPP chairperson. According to the United Daily News, 53 percent of the public were dissatisfied with Tsai's performance in handling the protests, while 26 percent were satisfied. The China Times poll indicated that 59 percent of the public did not support the protests, while 26 percent did. The results of such polls are generally skewed in the Blue direction. Nonetheless, it seems likely that the protests, while perhaps a hit with the Green base, did not enjoy broad support from the general public.

FM Ou and LY Speaker Wang: Protests May Educate Beijing

¶19. (C) In a November 7 meeting with the Director, Foreign Minister Ou expressed the view that the demonstrations might result in greater PRC flexibility on cross-Strait issues. Even though it was a small group making a lot of noise, Ou said, China did not want to see support for Taiwan independence grow. Better to act now to improve cross-Strait relations and bolster the Ma administration than face the

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prospect of dealing with a DPP administration in the future. Similarly, although Chen did not use the title "President" to refer to Ma Ying-jeou, his willingness to take part in a meeting in which Ma Ying-jeou was introduced as President was tacit acceptance of Ma's call for mutual non-denial of the other's existence.

¶10. (C) Legislative Yuan Speaker Wang Jin-pyng (KMT) told the Director that Chen Yunlin's visit served two purposes. First, the four SEF-ARATS agreements met Taiwan's needs and were widely supported. Even the DPP did not object to the agreements. Second, the protests gave Chen a "shock education," and this would enable Beijing and Ma Ying-jeou to realize they could not push too hard for unification. Wang claimed credit for being the only KMT leader who spoke directly to Chen Yunlin about Taiwan's desire that China withdraw its missiles and not block Taiwan's quest for increased international space. In his remarks to Chen during their small breakfast meeting on Wednesday (11/5), Wang also used the formula "one China, separate interpretations," and he encouraged Chen to talk to all parties (i.e., also the DPP). Wang invited NPC Chairman Wu Bangguo to visit Taiwan and he told Chen he would not rule out visiting the mainland at an appropriate time. Chen invited Wang to visit China but did not respond to Wang's political points, because, Wang said, Chen did not have authorization to discuss such issues. Wang told the Director he does not have any concrete plans at this time to visit the mainland.

Su Chi: President Ma Believes Chen's Visit Was a Success

¶11. (C) NSC's Su Chi told the Director late on Friday that he and Ma believed the Chen visit had been a success. Like FM Ou, Su said the protest clashes with police could end up helping the Ma government by convincing China it must be more forthcoming on cross-strait issues. Su stressed that the brevity of yesterday's Ma-Chen meeting was the direct result of last minute failure to properly resolve differences over the nomenclature issue (i.e. how Chen addressed Ma). Negotiations continued right through the night before the meeting, but it became clear that Chen Yunlin had no

negotiating flexibility to compromise. Thus the decision was made to deny the visitor any speaking role during what was essentially an exchange of gifts. As to the hard line adopted by Ma on the nomenclature issue, Su said while it might be possible to make do with "Mister" in Beijing and at international venues, it was simply not an option here in Taiwan. "It was a question of Taiwan's dignity," Su stressed. President Ma also touched upon Taiwan's quest for international space in his brief remarks, a significant marker to Beijing that this issue is going to have to move to the center of the agenda in the coming months. Finally, Su believed that the Ma government had decisively won the battle of public opinion over violent clashes between DPP demonstrators and police, citing polls taken this Friday that show popular support of the government at two to one over those favoring the DPP.

Comment

¶12. (C) Neither DPP Chair Tsai nor President Ma emerged from this week's events and protests undamaged. Ma's meeting with Chen Yunlin was significantly scaled back and is unlikely to change the minds of those who view Ma as a weak and ineffective leader. Tsai's inability to control the demonstrations raises questions about her own leadership abilities and also reinforces the view that, with a privileged elite background, she is out of step with the DPP's more radical base. As expected, some KMT politicians are claiming the protests prove the DPP is a party prone to violence and devoid of new ideas. Meanwhile, many middle class citizens saw the Ma government's enormous security preparations for the visit as an over-reaction or even an effort to provoke the opposition. Nevertheless, scenes of

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demonstrators hurling stones, plastic bottles and Molotov cocktails at police are unlikely to attract new supporters from Taiwan's relatively conservative middle class to the DPP cause. They have also arguably damaged Taiwan's strong positive image as a successful young democracy, though hopefully that will force both sides to step back from any further such incidents of violence even as their differences over how to deal with China persist.

SYOUNG